

Hood Soldiers support local Special Olympics Games

By Capt. Michael Greenberger

3rd Sig. Bde. PAO

GATESVILLE — Soldiers from the 313th Signal Company, 3rd Signal Brigade, and the 21st Cavalry Brigade (Air Combat) set up equipment displays on Saturday at Gatesville High School Stadium, where local Special Olympics teams met to compete against one another in the Area 12 Special Olympic Games.

This has been the second year local Special Olympics teams have met in Gatesville to compete. "Teams throughout this area (Area 12) have to compete in two local competitions before going on to compete in the state games, usually held in mid-summer," according to event coordinator Rena' Caldwell.

The Special Olympics is considered year-round sports training, with track meets held in early spring to determine the abilities of athletes wanting to compete. Local meets, like the Gatesville meet, provide athletes the opportunity to compete and show off their ability to compete on a state level.

"Athletes arrive at the meet as a team, but compete as individuals," Caldwell said. "Age has little to do with competitors. The athletes compete based on their ability."

Funding for the events was provided mostly by local businesses, civic organizations, churches and fund-raising events.

"Everyone here in Gatesville ponies up when needed," said Medical Director Scott Coleman. "It's a very, very generous community and we are really lucky to be here."

Coleman coordinated with Fort Hood to bring Soldiers out to the event and display their equipment for athletes, families and volunteers.

Spc. Brian Cochran, Spc. Joshua-Joseph "JJ" Cournoyer, and Pvt. 2 Charlie Vorsteg of the 313th Sig. Co. arrived early to set up their Secure Mobile Anti-Jam Reliable Tactical-Terminal, or SMART-T, to give attendees a glimpse at Army communica-



Photos by Capt. Michael Greenberger, 3rd Sig. Bde. PAO

ABOVE, Athletes compete at Gatesville High School during the Area 12 Special Olympics Meet. RIGHT, Spc. Brian Cochran helps a child try on his protective equipment.

tions equipment. The SMART-T gives warfighters the ability to communicate via satellite, quickly and efficiently.

The games opened at 9:30 a.m. with cheers as a parade of athletes made their way around the stadium track. The excitement reached near pandemonium as an AH-64D Longbow Apache attack helicopter roared in overhead.

Coordinated by Coleman to pass over the field as the opening ceremony started, the Apache performed a fly-by before landing in a field behind the stadium.

Maj. Allen Hahn and CWO 4 Mike Hampton, 21st Cav. Bde. (AC) disembarked their aircraft and quickly set up their display, while a horde of excited kids and equally excited



adults rushed over to greet them.

In the stadium, the "Star Spangled Banner" played and athletes, hand on heart, sang along. The smiling athletes, eager to show their

stuff, cheered when the Gatesville High School Band concluded the national anthem.

Athletes lined up to compete in traditional Olympic events such as

the standing long jump, shot put, running long jump, 100-meter dash and other relays. Additional Special Olympics events included a wheelchair race, a motorized obstacle course and assisted walk.

Athletes continued all day long to give it their all before cheering crowds of friends, family and spectators.

Behind the stadium, the three signal Soldiers explained satellite communications to curious event patrons, and helped kids try on their personal gear protective, such as body armor and Kevlar helmets.

One after another, cheery faces asked if they could wear the Soldiers' equipment. The enthusiastic Soldiers obliged the youths and did everything they could to make the day special for them.

"I had a great time today," said Vorsteg, "The best part was all the kids climbing on our truck and having such a great time."

"It was a terrific change of pace," Cochran said, "a big change from the normal day-to-day."

At the Longbow, Hahn and Hampton were busy helping kids up and down off their aircraft, while explaining the tremendous capabilities the aircraft has. With questions like, "How many targets can you track at once?" and "How fast can you fly?" Hampton and Hahn did their best to entertain the crowds of onlookers. When thanked for coming, Hampton exclaimed, "It's your aircraft; we just have the privilege of flying it."

When asked what their favorite part of the day was, one 7-year-old shouted, "Watching the Apache take-off."

Fort Hood will host the Special Olympics May 5 and 6, providing teams of Area 12 another chance to qualify for the state level competitions in July.